

ASK most people around High Wycombe how they rate Wycombe Wanderers' chances against Reading and you'll probably get the answer 'a home win'. But one man, more experienced than most in FA Cup football, feels it will not be as easy as that (writes Stuart Earp).

The man in question is Alan Phillips, the Blues centre half, who is likely to receive special attention tomorrow at Loakes Park. The reason? It was Alan who sent Reading crashing out of the Cup last season when he scored the only goal of the game for Hendon at Claremont Road.

Alan remembers the goal well. "It came from a set piece after about 60 minutes. Bobby Childs sent over the free kick and John Baker flicked the ball on. The marking was surprisingly lax for professionals and I headed in from about eight yards. It was a similar goal to the one against Merthyr at Wycombe this season."

Apart from the glory of that goal, Alan tells an amusing story of the Hendon v Reading game which was in the first round.

"I wasn't feeling too good on the day and I had lost my voice on the Friday before. I remember the players saying they would enjoy the game far more without my usual comments coming from behind them. Poor Dave Yerby suffered the most. Throughout the game I kept thumping him to shout at the players."

But although he has already been on the winning side once against Reading, Alan feels that tomorrow's game is anything but a foregone conclusion. "My main worry is that everyone is tipping us to win. Reading are a good side and I keep telling people they will be a real handful for us.

"We will have to be at our very best to win this one and if we do play as well as we can, then we'll give them a hell of a game.

"But we can't afford to have some players in the side off form. If only four are playing on top form, we could struggle. We need the whole side to be 100 per cent."

Alan feels Wycombe will have to harass the Third Division club from the start. He says: "Basically professionals are more skilful than non-league players. Therefore we must chase and harry them to upset their rhythm."

Two things in Wycombe's favour, says Alan, are the crowd and the pitch. "The crowd will help us considerably while the pitch is never easy when you play on it for the first time.

"It's not easy to adapt to Loakes Park and on some occasions it can be worth a goal start. But there can be no complaints about the surface which is second to none in the league."

FA Cup giant killing has been part of Alan's career for a long time. This will be his seventh crack at a Football League team and so far his record reads Won 2, Drawn 3, Lost 4. Apart from the win over Reading, he was in the Wanderers team that drew and beat Bournemouth two years ago, followed of course, by those two epic matches against Middlesbrough.

With Hendon, he has met Swindon, Plymouth and Newcastle. Hendon lost 1-0 to Swindon at home after the Reading game last season, while Plymouth beat them 1-0 with a goal in the dying seconds at Home Park.

The Newcastle matches must hold a special place in Alan's memories. They were watched by 30,000 at St James Park when Rod Haider equalised to make the final score 1-1. Alan was marking one Malcolm MacDonald in that game and kept him pretty quiet too! It was a different matter in the replay though, when Supremac scored the first goal at Watford in Newcastle's 4-1 triumph.

The former Wycombe skipper has also got his name on the scoresheet a few times in cup matches. Apart from the winning goal for Hendon last year, Alan scored a beauty against Merthyr Tydfil three years ago when playing for Hendon. Wanderers fans will remember just how close he came to scoring for the Blues against Middlesbrough at Loakes Park. A couple of inches the other way and Alan's header could have won Wycombe a home tie with Sunderland in the fourth round. It was the closest Wanderers came to scoring against mighty 'Boro.